

RECONNECTING PEOPLE WITH THE LIVING LEGACY OF THE LOMOND HILLS

Children's Parliament consultation
for Living Lomonds Landscape Partnership.
May - July 2012



INTRODUCTION

The aim of the Living Lomonds Landscape Partnership is to reconnect people with the living legacy of the Lomond Hills by: bringing people to the hills; revealing and reviving the lost heritage in the hills; celebrating and sustaining all the good things that come from the hills.

As part of their work to gather information from people living and working in the Lomond Hills area, the partnership was keen to ensure the views of children informed the development phase. It was recognised that the views of our youngest citizens – and those for whom the plans would have the longest and possibly more profound impact – were essential components in forming the next stage of the work. The Children's Parliament was approached to undertake this consultation.

The Children's Parliament commissioned artists Owen Pilgrim (story teller and sculptor) and Rosie Gibson (makes work with and for children, and about childhood) to consult with children in schools round the Lomond Hills Country Park, on how they and their families access and use the hills and on what might enhance their experience of the hills.

We worked with p5/6 in Benarty, Portmoak, Freuchie and Markinch Primary schools through May and June 2012, and ended up producing what might be best described as an 'outstallation' (as opposed to an installation!) comprising a paper tent and clootie tree by each school and sound montage of the children's experiences and stories from the hills, and their wishes for the future of the hills.

HOW DID WE START?

Since we were strangers to one another we had a walking meeting to get to know one another a bit and to start planning the work. We went for a walk up Glen Vale via John Knox Pulpit then on up to the watershed then west on to the summit of West Lomond in the mist, then down (via slight aberration!) to the Bonnet Stane and Maiden Bore Cave, before retiring to the Pillars of Hercules for a working lunch.

We discovered we shared a sensibility about the pleasures and pitfalls of 'consulting' with children and swapped some theoretical and pragmatic references:

- Metasaga - landscape as metaphor, a technique developed by Primary School teacher Kate Coutts of Uyeasound Primary School in Unst, Shetland
- Placemaking - a phenomenological approach - the subjective feel of everyday lived experience in the landscape
- Owain Jones 'Approaching the Otherness of Children', Children's Geographies, Vol 6, No.2, May 2008
- He discusses the usefulness of bearing witness, narrative and creative projects as bridging tools between adults and children in this field. Also non-representational theory - focus on emotion, embodiment, relationality, ecology, complexity, affect, movement, performance, play, excess, life energy.
- Nigel Thrift, Non-representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect, ILS, 2007

We reached aims and aspirations of the project:

- use children's experience and expertise (and their families and friends) as a basis for the work
- create a framework for children and families to reflect on their subjective and unique relationships with the landscape, past, present and future
- fun and productive for everyone
- Methods and Materials:
- children's research with family and friends
- storytelling via characters children invent
- sound recording stories and ideas
- mapping
- inspire by showing models/examples and use the children's response to inspire the next step
- devise a blog for ongoing contributions from children
- produce a large scale map illustrating the findings and a
- SoundCloud <http://soundcloud.com> of children's place stories, thoughts and feelings.

SCHOOL SESSIONS

We visited each school three times.

Rather than start with a plan and outcomes we wanted to initiate a call and response cycle where we gave the children inspiration and resources and invited them to respond. Then we would use their material as the spring board for the next session.

School Session 1:

- Intro to Owen and Rosie
- Owen recited his story about a character Rowen and her adventures in the hills based on our walk.
- Slideshow of the Landscapes in the Lomond Hills and Benarty
- Gifting of Resource Packs - hand drawn maps of the hills, a sheet of research questions, a sheet of narrative and character adventure questions, stickers, sketch book, a propelling pencil, Falkland Centre for Stewardship postcard, all in a cool coloured plastic folder.

The children loved the story and from their response to the slideshow we knew there was a general familiarity with Benarty and the Lomond Hills. They enjoyed getting their resource packs which we had carefully considered to be special and pragmatic at the same time.

We gave them a week to respond, then returned to each school to pick up the packs for analysis.

Session 1 Analysis:

The children rose well to the challenge. Below is a list of themes which emerged from each school:

Themes from Markinch:

Gorgeous view
Yummy picnic, huge picnic, picnic tables, picnic...
A bush that looked like a strawberry
Create an art studio
My Grandad knows quite a few things
Humongous waterfall
Wenlock and Mandeville...
Having a barbeque
Troublesome goblin

Glittering fairy
Fairy folk in a cave
Olympics
Thunder & lightning
'Just to stay as it is'
Learned how to ride my bike
Easter egg rolling
Dad goes mountain biking
To go sledging
Sundial at the top

Running & climbing
Create a play park with swings, chute,
see-saw & exercise equipment
Dad & uncle camped at John Knox Pulpit
when...in boy's brigade
Fairy cave that leads to fairy land
'I want to go because they look so
beautiful'
Being in the hills is exciting

Walking with Dad
Lovely forest with nature all around
'You can see loch leaven and the golden
field and shimmering loch. It's wonderful.'
Catch fish
Set up camp for the night
Game of I Spy

Themes from Freuchie:

Easter egg rolling
Picnic, picnic tables
Freuchie den
Huge rabbit statue
Big rock, lots of rocks
Swing park
The mysterious creature
Walks with Dad
Very steep
Adventures
Feeling very excited. We couldn't wait to
get up the hill
(words exciting & excited used a lot)
Getting off the beaten path
The faerie folk
Flowers and swings and a... climbing
frame
Sweet, smelling flowers
Snail fossil
'I like the hills because you never know
what is coming next even if you have been
up it before'
A sense of satisfaction
Volcanic rock
Climbing
Walking with dog
Racing 'I raced the elf back down to the
car'

A small door in the side of the hill
Fairy time
Gave them a golden sword to protect the
hills
The giant sleeping
With the dogs and my family
'I miss going there with my Gran &
Grandad'
Meets fairies, goblins and dwarfs
Running down
Tumbling and tumbling
'scrambled up to the top'
Clouds covering everything
'My mum was a gliding instructor'
'The snow was drenching'
The view

Themes from Benarty:

We were inspired to create a composite poem from their imaginings! :

A Sponsored Walk up Benarty Hill
Frogs, dragons and evil elves
We enter Littleland with fairies and pixies
Emerge with our teeth intact to meet
a family of tramp/dragon/alien creatures
We're running and climbing, rolling and falling
So high we can see Navitie
Eagles and castles and a bunny named Flopsie
Steep and hard and tired to the summit!
Touch the clouds and taste the picnic!
Whao! steep down below is a humungous lake!
(Personally I think the bath of the giant)
Then on the way down:
Katy taken hostage by witch in prince drama!
Getting lost and losing shoes down rabbit burrow!
Call dad for help. Help!
Please don't be too busy now.
Phew! Thanks Dad!
We're all back down to the ground
And raised loads of cash for our favourite charity

Meanwhile Scott and his dog Scruff, an Irish wolfhound were taking a calm walk from Rhind Hill round the reservoirs Ballo, Drumain and Holl, taking in the waterfall and the highland cows and the fishing boats. Watch this space for the creepy bit.....

Themes from Portmoak:

Sleeping Giant's hands
Bishophill, steep rocks
False top
Little adventures
Rolling and falling
Monster hole rumbling
Fairy steps and huge footprints
A bouncy bit
500 acres of sheep on the hill
Stone cairns
Picnics, family, dog

Taking visitors to the top - a big group photo at the top
'Get off my hill', says the sleeping giant
Story of the giant being formed and carried back home by the people
Barbecue
Poet Michael Bruce.... twisted and knarled
Cycling all the way down!



After immersing ourselves in their material we came up with the idea of creating tents which could feature the hills as the children saw them, with room for their characters and stories. In the spirit of call and response we made a model to illustrate our idea and selected good quality materials for their tent making.

School Session 2

Then we presented a word montage about general themes which had emerged from their collective work:

Running, falling, wind, weather, rocks, fossils
False tops, steep struggle, dog pulls, the top!
Views, big group photo, and time for treats!
Picnics and barbecues what did we eat?
Fairies and goblins, tunnels and caves, secret journeys
and sleeping giants waking up!
Gliding, mountain biking, fishing, camping by waterfalls
Buzzards and bunnies, roe deer and ravens, sheep and shepherd
Sunset on Benarty, the giant back in bed and it's time for ours too!

And some good quotes:

'I've never been to the Lomond Hills. I want to go because they look so beautiful'

'I like the hills because you never know what's coming next, even if you've been up before'

'The strong wind - it's almost like it holds you'

'The snow was drenching'

'A small and spacious hole'

'Just stay as it is - free'

Then we showed the kids the model, told them our ideas for their big tent and investigated materials.

Some children chose to work on the landscapes directly on to the tent paper. Others developed characters and landscape features 'offsite' to add later.

School Session 3

This session we completed the tents, made sound recordings of children's stories and feelings about the hill, and added a wish for the hills to a cloutie tree.



EXHIBITION

We presented the tents, Cloutie Trees and Sound Tracks at The Queen's Jubilee Celebrations in Falkland Palace in June 2012 and at the Big Tent Festival in July 2012.

The uniqueness of each tent landscape illustrates the children's relationships with the hills from where they live. At the same time, many common themes emerged - a love of being in the hills, going for picnics, special, magical places, running, rolling, getting to the top, with family and pets.

A short video of the Falkland Jubilee celebrations can be seen here: [Light on the Lomonds](#)





WISHES FOR THE FUTURE

'I wish the hill would be my friend'.

The Clootie tree for each class tells us the children's wishes for the future of the hills.

The most common wishes were for the hills to stay the same (8) and to go to the hills more often (8). Three wishes were for the hills to be bigger - this is noteworthy. We think there is scope for them to 'be bigger' and more challenging for children e.g. by promoting routes that start lower down and have bigger circuits. There were also three wishes around a desire for more animals, and care for animals and trees.

There were a range of suggestions for fun in the hills:

'I wish our tent would appear on the Lomond Hills' (we think the one they made for the paper tent).

'I wish there were elves and special things up the hill'.

'A viewpoint in a good place'.

'I wish that the hills had a wishing tree'.

'I wish the hills would stay nice and clean and there be lots of surprises'.

Three requests were for unspecified activities, the one for a bouncy castle, one for a playpark, one for a café, one for an art studio and one (from a cyclist?) for no potholes. Not all wishes would be achievable - less rain, my house in the hills, a Scottish monkey living in the hills! One was to have lots of information for children. We wondered if children could also provide the information. And while we were in the schools one classroom assistant asked for information about suitable routes for children - it might be daunting to start taking children into the hills as a parent with no experience, themselves.

Finally a vote of confidence - *'I wish for this project to happen more so more people get their opinion to improve the Lomond Hills'*

As a way of feeding back to the children we plan to make a book of the project, and each participating school will get a copy. This will include documentation of the project, images of the exhibition set up at Falkland Palace and at the Big Tent Festival, and key points from this report.

INSIGHTS AND IDEAS

- How perfect these hills are in scale, steepness and scope for children. They are like mini munroes - many routes of a day or half a day's length going at child pace.
- The love of fantasy and storytelling in the landscape that children have. There is great scope to have features/subtle interventions/activities which interest them on the way.
- One of the features that figured prominently in the children's depictions and stories was water - burns, waterfalls, rivers, lochs... and again the Lomond Hills and Benarty have great water features. There is a natural affinity between children and water.
- And on the very popular theme of picnics: to create destination picnic sites which could be quite low key, low impact but very magical places.
- As well as physical/space/object interventions we mulled over the idea of access interventions too – e.g. a children's picnic club, the idea to create time for 'just being' in the hills.
- The scope for children to be directly involved in the next phase of the Heritage Lottery Project - given the energy and enthusiasm and expertise they have brought to the first phase. Some suggestions:
 - Children being involved in providing child friendly information
 - A blog for children to post their stories and adventures and expeditions in the hills.
 - Children's characters/designs/aesthetic being incorporated into any signage/mapping/way marking from an early stage, given the fantastic characters and stories, which feature on the tents.
- A wildcard - after camping next to 'the hut' at Big Tent Festival, finding out about the Reforesting Scotland 1000 Huts Project, and observing how children took to the hut, we ponder the possibility of children designing a hut for the hills...

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE

The consultation with children has exceeded initial expectations in terms of the quality and relevance to the development phase of the Living Lomonds Landscape Partnership. A commitment to an honest and open process, where children's views were skilfully sought has delivered a range of useful, informed views and insights that will assist future development of the landscape. Having yielded such positive results, we believe that there is significant potential to build on this process of engaging children in the longer term development and delivery of the programme.

Children have demonstrated their interest in all aspects of life in Lomond Hills. Building on this commitment would offer a wonderful opportunity to develop children's stewardship of the area as well as a unique opportunity to retain children's interest and participation throughout their teens.

A long term benefit to involving younger children in the development process is that it gives the opportunity to retain their involvement throughout their teens – arguably the most difficult years to engage young people. Harnessing the initial enthusiasm and interest of children provides a strong platform from which to build a robust and engaging process which can continually inform the development process. Importantly, it also creates an excellent opportunity to develop inter-generational activities and consequently new positive relationships between local children and adults.

The initial children's consultation involved children from 4 primary schools. There are, however, 24 primary schools and 5 secondary schools serving the Lomond Hills area. Processes such as this link directly to children's learning and support the key national priority 'Curriculum for Excellence' and so schools are very receptive to supporting their children and young people to be involved in active and creative learning experiences which are suitable for children and young people with a range of abilities and backgrounds.

The Children's Parliament's consultation and engagement process has demonstrated the value of how effectively and genuinely younger children's engagement can enhance and add momentum to a wider community engagement process.

CHILDREN'S PARLIAMENT

Children's Parliament gives children the opportunity to voice their ideas, thoughts and feelings honestly so that their concerns and opinions can be listened to and included in our social and political landscape.

Using creative, thematic and child-centred approaches we allow all children to feel included. By demonstrating the value we place on their opinions, they are given the opportunity to learn and develop skills which will allow them to become active participants in Scottish society in an atmosphere and environment which fosters a feeling of trust and safety.

By offering children the tools with which to develop and communicate their own opinions we also provide adults with a unique, valuable insight into the hopes and concerns of today's children.

Children's Parliament gives ideas a voice...

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Sincere thanks to Rosie Gibson and Owen Pilgrim who led the project for Children's Parliament. Their skills, expertise and commitment ensured a truly inspiring and imaginative process with outcomes that directly and usefully informed the wider consultation process.



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